

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 228 374

UD 022 743

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TITLE Use of Documentary and Face to Face Interaction in Working Toward School Improvement. Draft. Documentation and Technical Assistance in Urban Schools.
INSTITUTION Center for New Schools, Inc., Chicago, Ill.; Oregon Univ., Eugene. Center for Educational Policy and Management.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. School Capacity for Problem Solving Group.
PUB DATE Aug 77
CONTRACT 400-75-0018
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - General (140)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Information Dissemination; *Information Sources; *Information Utilization; Linking Agents; Technical Assistance; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Documentation and Technical Assistance Project

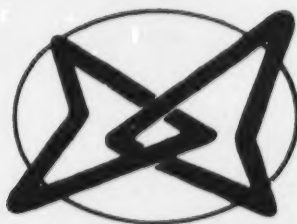
ABSTRACT

This paper compares the usefulness of documentary (written materials) versus face to face delivery of information in helping to bring about urban school improvement. The paper is based on the experiences of the Documentation and Technical Assistance Project (DTA) of the Center for New Schools (Chicago, Illinois), a program that aims to increase the problem solving capacities of schools by enabling these schools to use information from other schools, with DTA technical assistance teams working to facilitate the process. Distinguishing between documentary and face to face information, and between three types of information (fact, theory, and lore), the paper examines the relative effectiveness of each kind of information source in communicating the different types of information. Then, criteria that practitioners and DTA technical assistance teams use to evaluate the usefulness of information are discussed. Finally, types and sources of information used within DTA are described. It is emphasized that while both documentary and face to face delivery of information are present in the DTA setting, the latter is considered more useful because it is more responsive to the fluid needs of the DTA teams and school staff. (Author/MJL)

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USE OF DOCUMENTARY AND FACE TO FACE
INTERACTION IN WORKING TOWARD
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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August 1977

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Documentation and Technical Assistance in Urban Schools Project (DTA) is an effort to learn more about how to make urban public schools work better for urban students. Toward this end, DTA combines educational research and practice within one project. DTA's mandate has three interrelated parts:

DOCUMENTATION - to study, using primarily ethnographic techniques, the ways in which selected urban schools organize themselves to solve problems. Documentation focuses upon nine sites throughout the country selected and funded by NIE to continue to engage in locally initiated improvement activities.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE - to develop in practice specific strategies which are designed to improve urban public schooling. Technical assistance strategies are based in part upon documentation of useful practices in the nine funded sites.

LINKAGE - to increase understanding, through observation of DTA's attempts to link documentation with technical assistance, of the processes through which research can be useful to practice, and practice can influence research.

Our work is designed to effect school improvement through direct work in urban public schools and through sharing what we learn with the following audiences: parents, teachers, and administrators of urban public schools; the educational research community; groups or agencies working to assist urban schools; policy makers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank members of the DTA staff for contributing their activities and ideas which form the basis for this paper; members of the DTA Leadership Team for their support in the development of this work; Study Team staff members: Ann Boule, Jacqueline Berry, and Michael Donnellia for their many and varied contributions to the paper; Anne Wilson, Hannah Meara, and Thomas Wilson for significant contributions to the development of the paper; and finally, typist Jackie Brown and production assistant, Sarah Marter for bringing this draft to completion.

This paper is part of the Documentation and Technical Assistance Project of the Center for New Schools, 59 East Van Buren Street, Chicago, Illinois and of the Center for Educational Policy and Management, 1472 Kincaid Street, Eugene, Oregon. This Project is funded by the School Capacity for Problem Solving Program of the National Institute of Education, contract #400-75-0018. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect views of that agency.

Introduction: Purpose and Context of Paper

This paper looks at the problem of the differential usefulness of documentary and face to face delivery of information to bring about school improvement. In many research projects it is customary to share information almost exclusively through writing or through the oral presentation of written materials. The Documentation and Technical Assistance Project (DTA), on which the current paper is based, is different from such exclusively research projects in that the information creators and first line consumers, including school assistance people, work together within the same project to make information useful to the improvement of urban public education. The shared goal of all members of the project is to increase the problem solving capacities of schools through using information from other schools. In this project face to face delivery of information is achieved more easily and perceived as more useful than is documentary delivery of information. The following section will briefly describe the project on which this work is based. We then will present our findings with regard to differential forms of information utilization within this project.

The DTA project is the result of a major contract with the National Institute of Education to carry out research and assistance activities.* A primary responsibility is to adapt problem solving information gathered from nine previously selected educational settings to the needs of other educational settings. The project identified two educational settings in which to concentrate its assistance efforts: District 21 of the Chicago Public Schools and the Oakland Public School District. Technical Assistance Team Members were responsible for working out ways to use information collected through the project's research efforts. An internal

*See Wilson, T., 1977 for general background on the history, time line, approach, purposes, and organizational structure of DTA.

Study Team, headed by the author, was responsible for understanding the process through which the products of the researchers within the project were made useful to the technical assisters.* It is a segment of that work which the present paper reports.

Sources and Kinds of Information Used by
Researchers, Technical Assisters, and Practitioners

The purpose of this section is to present a kind of map, or configuration of categories, through which one can usefully organize the kinds of information creation and utilization required by educational researchers, practitioners, and technical assisters in a project such as DTA.

The primary contrast between documentary and face to face information sources is that between the frozen and the fluid. Documentary information sources are fixed, set. While each can be perceived and used differently by different audiences, each documentary source does not change its form once created. It is incapable of interacting with its audience or user, although its audience will interact with it. It cannot accommodate its form or content to the particular and changing needs of its audience. Unless specifically designed to address the particular situation in which it is being used, it cannot participate in adapting its form and content to that situation. While the most common form of documentary information is writing (which can be the tightest form), other forms such as tapes, videotapes, and pictures share the frozen characteristics of the category.

In contrast, the face to face information source is fluid. Human beings as sources of information hold vast reservoirs of potentially communicable information which can be fluidly, flexibly, and responsively tapped to meet the

*Field notes were made by Study Team Members of observations of such processes among DTA Project Members. Current understanding comes from study of those data. Data were searched for cases which run counter to these descriptions and none were found.

needs of the particular situation for which information is being sought. Furthermore, because information flow in face to face situations is two-way, human resources constantly interact with, learn from, and adapt their responses to the needs and realities of the situation. A human resource, unlike a documentary resource, can take initiatives within the information sharing situation, such as amplifying or compressing information, choosing and altering the level of complexity, choosing and altering point of view, communicating concretely or abstractly, and creating new connections of meaning within the face to face situation.

We have heard over and over again in our project that teachers are the most difficult group in a school community to approach because they distrust the advice of anyone who has not been in their classrooms. We have heard that teachers generally believe that most educational theories cannot be readily applied to every classroom, especially theirs. This impression of teachers and their reputed approach to knowledge from outside their experience made it all the more important for members of the DTA Project to be able to come into classrooms and demonstrate various educational techniques and concepts. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction that a teacher would have as a result of such a demonstration is something that simply cannot be duplicated in written or other visual material.

Three kinds of information can be distinguished, although they often are combined in the particular information sharing encounter. The three we are distinguishing are fact, theory, and lore. While the boundaries between them are not absolute, different characteristics tend to apply to the three kinds.

Facts, whether actually true or false, are intended as description of reality, actuality, truth. Although they may be abstract, they tend toward the concrete. Following is an example of a fact that tends to be raised in a variety of educational settings, including DTA:

That a student who is deficient in reading ability will have his or her learning in all other subjects impaired is a fact merely because classroom learning in any subject demands reading ability.

In itself each fact is isolated, discrete. The world of fact, by itself, does not offer any connections between different facts. Such connections and combinations of facts, in their infinite variety, must come from the unifying and synthesizing power of personal world view, theory, lore, and art.

Theory, in contrast with fact, belongs to the realm of abstract speculation. Theory deals with explaining the general relationships and underlying principles of phenomena. Although people will disagree about specific instances, fact and theory can be defined in a mutually exclusive way. To the extent that a particular theory is able to predict, explain, and create order, it can be said to have power. But when a particular theory has become fully verified for a person or group, so that no question mark remains beside it, it no longer is a theory, but has become a fact for that person or group. For example, some administrators with whom technical assistance team members have had contact, have a theory that increased parental involvement in school activities leads to higher quality education. Because this assertion is still subject to much doubt in the general educational community, it is rightfully characterized as a theory for that group, admittedly an underdeveloped version of such a theory. On the other hand, however, some of those school administrators have become so committed to the theory that for them it has become a fact.

Lore is a comprehensive* term for a body of traditional knowledge and experience-based wisdom which is primarily transmitted orally and which grows out

*While the term lore does encompass a broader area, we are using it to refer to that aspect of lore which consists in traditional beliefs, practices, and legends of people, usually transmitted orally. (See American Heritage Dictionary of English Language, 1973, pp. 509-510.)

of the shared facts, experiences, and beliefs of a group of people. Lore is a more comprehensive concept than theory, as a theory is more comprehensive than a fact. A particular body of lore will contain both theoretical and factual elements, as well as knowledge accepted from other than objective or intellectual sources. While fact and theory do not necessarily reach back into time, the lore of a group connects its present with its past history, and often reaches into its future. Every enduring and cohesive group (including scientific groups) has a body of lore, although the term is more useful for large cohesive groups with long histories. The function of lore is different from the functions of fact and theory. A body of fact is an unorganized pool of potentially useful information. A theory is a rational/intellectual attempt to discover and impose an often temporary order and meaning out of chaos and meaninglessness. A body of lore is an integrating, unifying resource which connects the concrete with the abstract, the specific with the general. It provides the group with a meaningful and comprehensive view of reality which is grounded in its own specific facts, history, and values. Lore is the oral tradition which accompanies practice. In the case of the Learning Community (site 8) in New York, the site researcher stresses the importance of lore in the form of history when one wishes to understand what is going on in the school assistance work of that group. She (Karunakaran, 1977) believes that it is important to understand the current work in relation to its historical development in both the United States and Britain. Further understanding, she claims, is gained by considering the realities of urban schools with which the Learning Community concept must contend.

Many instances of created or potential information involve more than one category or kind of information. For instance, while a specific document such as a memo internal to our project can concern itself with strictly factual information, pure theory, or pure lore, it also can concern itself with an analysis

of the relationship between a theory and certain facts, lore as grounded or demonstrated in observed events, or lore as related to theory. A specific human information source can draw from the fact, theory, or lore at his or her disposal, or can combine, connect, and selectively utilize different kinds of information as the particular information utilization situation requires. Furthermore, a particular knowledge utilization situation can involve both documentary and face to face information sharing. For example, members of the DTA Project gave a session consisting of informal discussion of the necessary steps to implement a peer tutoring project. One representative gave a brief explanation of the DTA purposes. Then two established peer tutoring programs were described as models. At the end of the session an article and a booklet on tutoring were given to teachers.

It is more difficult for documentary information sources than human information sources to capture the fluidity, complexity, and non-rational aspects of lore. For a documentary source to succeed in communicating lore it must at least approach becoming art. Writing is well suited, however, to dealing with fact and theory, and often is more successful in communicating hard facts and theory than oral efforts. As one DTA staff person stated:

Despite the importance of face to face communication within DTA, there is certain information which is communicated more efficiently in documentary form. Some examples would be information which DTA isn't directly responsible for such as brochures on legal rights of parents or school safety regulations or reference materials such as descriptions of peer tutoring programs or of DTA.

This person also felt that documentary information served a psychological purpose of furthering the credibility of DTA even if people in school communities did not read it.

The following diagram summarizes the foregoing discussion and gives an idea of focal kinds of information for social science researchers (including

educational researchers), technical assistance workers, and practitioners. Two classes of categories intersect with each other, forming the six major categories of an information matrix. We are distinguishing two sources of information: documentary and face to face sources and three kinds of information: fact, theory, and lore. The remaining portion of this paper will discuss how these foci are viewed in the DTA project.

Sources and Kinds of Information Used by Researchers,
Technical Assistants, and Practitioners

		Kinds of Information		
		FACT	THEORY	LORE
Sources of Information	DOCUMENTARY	Focus of most social science research information development & use		
	FACE TO FACE	Focus of most technical assistants information development and use is primarily face to face, but also documentary and includes all three kinds of information		Focus of most practitioner information development and use

Criteria for Usefulness of Information of Practitioners
and Technical Assistants

Usually research understanding is evaluated in terms of criteria from the research world, different from those of practitioners, and is not subject to direct and immediate evaluation in terms of usefulness to practitioners. Instead, a written product is evaluated in terms of the quality of the writing. Questions such as the following are the basis for evaluating the success of the written research product:

- . Does it get published?
- . What is the quality of the place where it is published?

- . For journals, are papers refereed (evaluated) by other researchers?
- . Is the writing style logical and readable?
- . Does it make a new contribution(s) to the existing pertinent and accepted body of knowledge?
- . Is it based on previous research?

Practitioners also have evolved shared criteria. In settings which directly involve practitioners, it is necessary to consider the criteria which practitioners pose about the usefulness of research information. In general, school practitioners expect information to help them work toward the improvement of day to day school activities. Some criteria which we have observed them use follow:

- . Will the information help me in my work? That is, can it be adapted and applied to my particular setting?
- . Does it give immediate clear policy direction?
- . Is it easily comprehensible, jargon free, and short?
- . Is the writer writing about things that he or she has experienced personally and fully?

Within the DTA setting, which combines research with practice, there are demands for information delivered so that it will be useful for specific school improvement, as well as demands for information which meets the criteria of researchers. Face to face delivery of information is more useful than documentary delivery because it can be more responsive to the fluid needs of assisters, and in turn, school people.

In face to face information delivery, the mutual interaction allows the information being shared to be matched directly to the needs of the practitioners. The human source selects examples, constructs explaining contexts, responds to questions, changes the focus, makes connections on the spot, creates by his or her presence and skill a personal connection between his information, himself or herself, and the audience, etc. in response to subtle and direct cues from the audience. Human interaction sources because of interaction with an audience, can more extensively share contexts. The target of the information sharing situation

is the needs of the school community being assisted, rather than the other school(s) or components which have been studied. The human information sources are present in the information sharing situation precisely because they have a rich reservoir of information about other somewhat similar situations. But their job is to bring that information to bear on the needs of the situation in which the practitioners in their audience are engaged. The human source's interpersonal skill and sensitivity are assets, along with their conceptual skills, in this communication process.

In reflecting on one of the technical assistance team's past activities, one team member made the following statement:

Face to face delivery of information is quite important because of the information that the deliverer can acquire. This feedback is important to the deliverer of information in assessing the usefulness of his information. Furthermore, face to face delivery facilitates follow-up questions on material presented. For example, in a special DTA event where an authority came to speak to a school community about Parents Legal Rights, the talk was periodically interrupted by questions. The speaker found that she emphasized certain parts of her topic more because they were more useful to the particular audience (consisting of a significant number of parents). This kind of spontaneity could not have been duplicated in written materials. Also, many individuals took advantage of the opportunity to ask further questions on a personal informal basis.

As this example and the foregoing discussion have suggested, types and sources of information differ in their usefulness to researchers, technical assistants, and practitioners.

Types and Sources of Information Used within DTA

In the DTA project face to face delivery of information occurs more readily than does documentary delivery. Nevertheless, certain kinds of documentary resources are extensively produced and are used. Some kinds of documentary resources are:

1. Raw notes from site researcher documentation.
2. Computer printouts of data bits stored in computer drawn from data collected by site researchers.

3. Case studies written by the site researchers about the the sites they have been studying.
4. Short analytical papers on some of the nine educational settings, written by some of the site researchers and the research coordinators.
5. Memos shared in the project as a result of individual information sharing initiative, in response to issues that arise, or in response to direct inquiry.
6. Materials and papers written by people working in the educational settings being studied by the site researchers.
7. Written products by people outside of the DTA network.
8. Long and short descriptive, theoretical, and analytical papers produced for varying audiences by the Documentation Team, the New York Region, the Chicago Region, the Eugene/Oakland Region, the Study Team, the Management Team, and the Project Director's Office.
9. Tapes--visual and audio records of specific face to face situations.
10. Tapes of meetings and personal reflection.
11. Pictures.

Within the project documentary materials are used mainly to support face to face information exchange situations. Documents may:

- . Provide compact and useful factual information on a particular topic.
- . Convey a particular message that stood as an example of a group's philosophical direction.
- . Provide visual support to convey concrete examples of how a general idea may be embodied in a specific situation.
- . Allow a resource person to supplement information presented orally with similar information in written form.

Documents also are useful as: (1) historical records, (2) evidence of respectability, (3) vehicles for rapid and sometimes broad communication, (4) bridges across geographic distance where face to face or telephone encounters

are not feasible, and (5) an effective form for presenting tight theory and analysis, allowing for rereading, study, reflection, delayed reaction by the audience(s), which is more difficult in fluid face to face encounters.

Despite the abundance and wide use of documents within the project as a whole, the DTA experience has confirmed that face to face transmittal of information, for the reasons already discussed, is the preferred, more prevalent, and more useful mode of transmitting information to practitioners. Furthermore the networks of formal and informal face to face information sharing within the project staff are extensive and complex. DTA's face to face resources include:

1. Site researchers who each have studied the educational activities in one of the nine previously selected educational settings.
2. Other people from the nine sites.
3. Research coordinators, who analyze and supervise site researcher activities.
4. People who are involved with the data management system, including coders. (See, for example, King, 1977.)
5. Technical assistance team members, who have wide ranges of experience outside DTA.
6. Study team members, who observe the work of the technical assistance staffs in Chicago and Eugene/Oakland.
7. New York documentation team members who hold seminars and generate information from the experiences of the nine sites, especially the four located in New York City.
8. The Project Director and his staff, who must concern themselves with the project as a whole and in its parts.
9. Anyone within and without DTA who visits and observes the documentation and/or technical assistance sites.
10. People with technical assistance experience outside DTA.

11. Other practitioners in the schools who have the responsibility of providing education to children.

Because of the importance of face to face exchanges of information within DTA, and face to face delivery to the technical assistance sites in Oakland and Chicago, interpersonal skill and sensitivity have been and continue to be important considerations in selecting DTA staff, and face to face interaction has been the primary medium of information transmittal both between project staff and between DTA staff and practitioners at the project's technical assistance sites.

Conclusion

We see our study of the sources and kinds of information which are differentially useful to members of our project in their work as ways to learn about these issues in the experiences of other researchers, technical assistants, and practitioners. Ours is a project where research and practice are done for the purpose of improving urban public education. It includes researchers and technical assistants, both of whom attempt to use information and to make it useful to others. In observing ourselves we hope to contribute to the understanding of more widely shared experiences with differential usefulness of information.

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